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AUTHOR	Bryan, C. Hobson; Bertrand, Alvin L.
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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of heads of 1,249 poor families in rural areas of the Mississippi Delta region who had high potential for breaking out of poverty were determined in this study. Potential for moving out of poverty was measured by degree of expressed willingness of a household head to take action for positive change in his circumstances. Such persons tended to be found in the younger age groups, married, with smaller households, Negro, and with a comparatively higher level of education. An assumption that low rates of social participation and high rates of fatalism were related to propensity for change was not supported. Nonparticipation of the rural poor in programs available to them was found to be frequent. Another major problem was in the formation of training and job opportunities appropriate to the requirements and dispositions of the people in the Delta. (BD)

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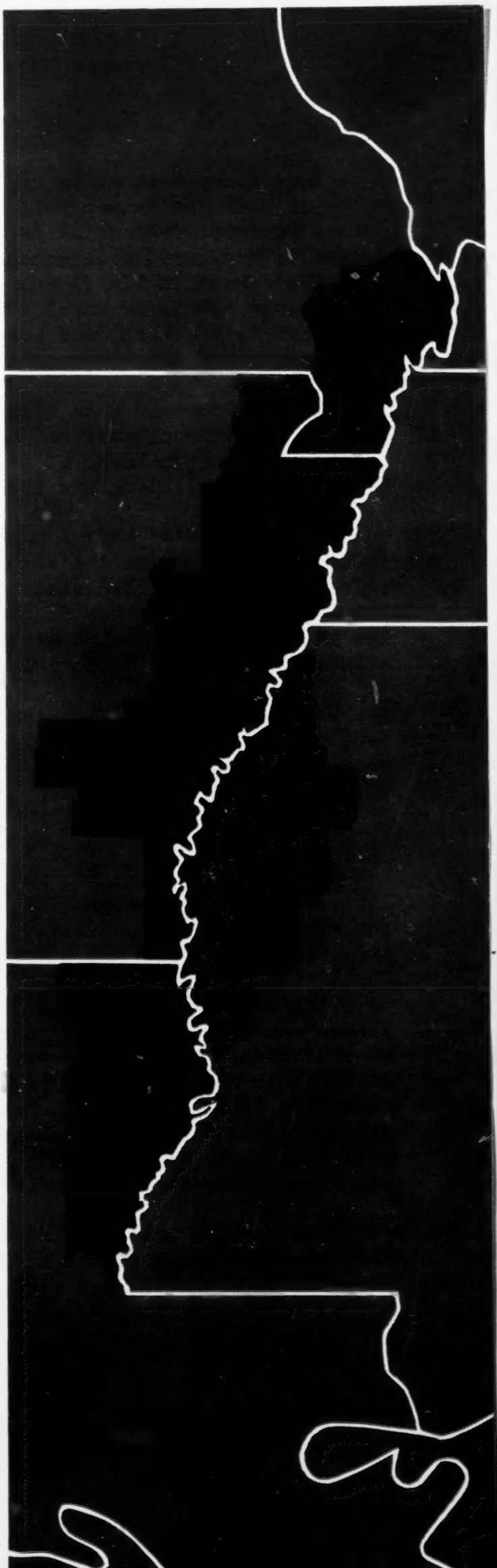
PROPENSITY FOR CHANGE AMONG THE RURAL POOR IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA:

A STUDY OF THE ROOTS OF SOCIAL MOBILITY



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ABSTRACT

This study determines the characteristics of poor family heads in rural areas of the Mississippi Delta Region who have high potential for breaking out of poverty. Potential for moving out of poverty was measured by the degree of expressed willingness of a household head to take action for positive change in his circumstances. The data were obtained from a randomized, block sample of rural inhabitants in the Delta areas of Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The 1,249 respondents constituted an approximate 1 percent sample of the region.

Household heads with high propensity for change tended to be in the younger age groups, married, heads of smaller households, Negro, and have a comparatively high level of education. Generally similar factors influence change potential among the relatively affluent in the Delta.

Lower rates of social participation and higher rates of fatalism were found to characterize the rural impoverished when they were compared with the relatively affluent individuals in the Delta. However, contrary to prevailing assumptions, neither of these characteristics was related to propensity for change. Thus, social participation and fatalism variables in no way affect individuals' potential for upward social mobility.

Key Words: Social participation, social mobility, rural, poverty, economic development, low-income people, occupational aspiration, occupational mobility, values, employment.

PREFACE

This publication reports on factors that influence willingness among the rural poor in the Mississippi Delta to act positively to change their life conditions.

The study was developed from a parent research project supported by funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity. The opinions and conclusions of this report do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the Office of Economic Opportunity. The Economic Research Service cooperated with Louisiana State University, Southern University, and Mississippi State University in planning and supervising the overall research. The data analyzed by ERS and LSU for this report can be considered representative of the rural areas of 42 counties in the Mississippi Delta.

The authors are indebted to George S. Tracy of the Department of Sociology, LSU, and Melvin R. Janssen, Max F. Jordan, and James H. Copp, ERS, for their advice and direction.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Contrary to prevailing assumptions, propensity for change did not relate to either lower rates of social participation or higher rates of fatalism among the rural poor. Like the relatively affluent, social participation and fatalism in no way affect individuals' potential for upward social mobility.

These findings stem from a methodologically unique study of characteristics of poor family heads in rural areas of the Mississippi Delta Region who have high potential for breaking out of poverty. The study measured household heads' potential for moving out of poverty by the degree of expressed willingness to act positively to change their circumstances. A hypothetical time element was interjected into the study design through the concept "propensity for change." Control of variables was achieved analytically and on the basis of nonparametric statistical tests.

Household heads with high propensity for change generally were younger, married, heads of smaller households, Negro, and well educated. Generally, similar factors influence change potential among the relatively affluent in the sample surveyed.

PROPENSITY FOR CHANGE AMONG THE RURAL POOR IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA: A STUDY OF THE ROOTS OF SOCIAL MOBILITY

by
C. Hobson Bryan 1/
and
Alvin L. Bertrand 2/

INTRODUCTION

Rural poverty is an increasing area for public concern, additional research, and corrective legislation. Characteristics and conditions that cause and reinforce poverty everywhere "come together in a maximum likelihood combination" in rural areas, according to Varden Fuller; he also wrote: (7, p. 390) 3/

> Rural poverty is intensive, extensive and intractable . . . yet, it is remote and obscure. The rural population--widely dispersed, racially and culturally heterogeneous, socially and politically incohesive--does not compete well for attention.

Because such conditions continue to exist, this and similar research has been conducted by ERS and other agencies.

The Problem

Evidence in research reports suggests an interrelationship among the physical, social, and psychological characteristics of the poor. This interrelationship, in fact, seems to reinforce and perpetuate their deprived condition. B.H. Bagdikian asserted that the poor are ". . . the products of a special way of life imposed on them not by their genes alone but by their poverty . . . poverty that perpetuates itself inside its own geography behind a border that separates the despairing from the hopeful" (1, p. 162). The

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1/ Social Science Analyst, Economic Development Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.; formerly stationed at Louisiana State University.
2/ Professor, Department of Sociology and Rural Sociology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La.
3/ Underscored numbers in parentheses refer to items in the Literature Cited, p. 22.

problem of the relative social immobility of the rural poor and the potential implications for social theory and action provided the impetus for this study. Attention focused on the possibility that certain variables may contribute to the perpetuation of this immobility.

This investigation analyzed the characteristics of poor rural persons in the Mississippi Delta Region who were considered potential breakers of the so-called poverty cycle by their willingness to take action for change. One primary object was to determine the possible interrelationship among three variables that were assumed to be related to upward social mobility. The major dependent variable of the study was termed "propensity for change." The underlying premise of this variable was that lower strata individuals express degrees of willingness to change their conditions for upward mobility and could therefore be arranged on a continuum of low to high potential for breaking the poverty cycle.

The discussion and analyses are oriented not in terms of aspirations, as such, but of one assumed consequence of such aspirations: willingness to change life conditions by positive action. This was an attempt to avoid the problem described below that is inherent in any study of attitudes--aspiration levels, in the study. "Attitude" can be viewed as the predisposition of an individual to respond to a given situation with appropriate action. It must be assumed that the validity of the expressed attitude rests on whether such action will actually occur. That is, there must be a close correspondence between attitude and behavior for the concept of attitude to have meaning. To avoid a gap between attitude and action, to the extent possible, this research centered at an intermediary level of abstraction: an <u>expressed commitment</u> to undertake a particular type of behavior, as opposed to the more abstract attitudes underlying such behavior.

It was recognized that factors contributing to the perpetuation of poverty might alter or block favorable or unfavorable attitudes of a person toward change. More specifically, the variables "social participation" and "fatalism" were considered potential negators or qualifiers of the conception that individuals inclined to change will achieve the desired goal. These, then, were considered as the second and third variables. What was being tested was the prevalent assumption that low rates of social participation and high rates of fatalism among the poor lessen their chances to move out of poverty.

Conceptual Framework

The literature on poverty is ambiguous about individuals who are disposed to improve their living conditions. On one hand, some assert that such a person may be more active in organizations, particularly those devoted to economic improvement or increasing the political power of their members. Writers who hold this idea argue that a primary reason for joining organizations is to increase opportunities for access to different channels of social mobility. Such opportunities include widened personal contacts, learning appropriate social behavior, or promoting change by group pressure against poor living conditions. Such a person would show little fatalism;

he would not express willingness to change if he thought he had little control over his destiny.

On the other hand, some writers theoretically link propensity for change, social participation, and fatalism with a phenomenon which has been variously termed as "status discrepancy," "status inconsistency," "low status crystallization," or "dissonance." These terms refer to individuals inclined toward change, who occupy marginal status positions or positions in which their roles are not clearly defined, and individuals who avoid participation in organizations where their status contradiction or ambiguity is most evident.

From the standpoint of fatalism, a marginal individual may more or less permanently withdraw from a situation producing role uncertainty or "dissonance," so that none of the elements in that situation is salient. He does this rather than simply avoid certain kinds of organizations while awaiting social mobility or change (6, p. 132). This conflict may stem from the contradictory demands of his discrepant statuses or by certain situation limitations imposed on the individual due to his disadvantaged position.

Fatalism may serve to intervene in the mobility process in another manner than that associated with the marginality from discrepant statuses. A different type of marginality may result when the expectations of better living conditions rise faster than the likelihood of their fulfillment. This phenomenon has been referred to as the "crisis of rising expectations." However, "revolution" does not always follow the "crisis," as some writers imply. Bertrand, Jenkins, and Walker have noted that the response to perceive deprivation often may be accompanied by symptoms of anomia (anxiety, despair, fatalism--discussed later, p. 7) (2, p. 12). Meier and Bell generalized that fatalism ". . . results when individuals lack access to means for the achievement of life goals" (10, p. 189). Thus, it is assumed that whether lower strata individuals know about and utilize the resources which are available to them is not a simple function of "getting the word" to the people involved. People may desire improvement of their conditions, but they may "fatalistically" believe that little can be done to change their situation. The evidence shows that some people with knowledge of resource channels do not take advantage of them. These people may have held high aspirations before becoming apathetic or fatalistic.

Therefore, a primary purpose of this study was to determine whether social participation and fatalism indeed intervene in the social mobility process and contribute to the perpetuation of a poverty cycle. More specifically, the study centered on whether participation and fatalism blocked poor individuals with high potential for upward social mobility, as determined by the expressed commitment on their part to take action for change. Assessing sociodemographic characteristics associated with propensity for change was an additional concern.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Design

Forty-two Mississippi Delta counties in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Missouri constituted the study area. The population consisted of rural

farm and nonfarm inhabitants who were heads of households. Individuals residing in incorporated areas with over 2,500 population were omitted from the 16-county sample. Data were collected in interviews with 1,249 respondents representing a 1-percent sample of household heads in the study area. 4/

The head of the household was defined as the person who usually earns most of the money that supports the family and who makes most of the important family decisions. When it was impossible to interview the household head (e.g., when head was away from home a week or more, seriously incapacitated due to a physical ailment, etc.), the spouse was interviewed. Therefore, caution is needed in making inferences concerning female "household heads" who cannot be considered representative of all adult females in the rural Delta. Their being interviewed was always contingent on the availability of the male head.

Working Definitions and Concepts

Poverty Status

Poverty was defined in terms of levels of household income adjusted by household size (table 1). These categories were developed jointly with researchers working on related studies in other regions to coordinate efforts and provide for interregional comparisons. 5/ For this investigation, the first three income-deprivation classes constituted the poverty category. The researchers included a third or "marginal" class in the general poverty category because our preliminary analysis showed this class closer to the impoverished than to the relatively affluent classes in terms of specific characteristics--for example, extent of fatalism and degree or kind of social participation. Where applicable, we incorporated the different classes or degrees of poverty in the analysis for refinement. This procedure also minimized the introduction of bias by the inclusion or exclusion of a specific class in either category.

Propensity for Change

The poor adult may best gain upward mobility and corresponding improvement of life circumstances through educational and vocational betterment. We therefore operationally defined propensity for change in terms of expressed degrees of willingness to take such action for change. The first type of "action for change," pertaining to education or training, was gauged by these questions:

4/ For a detailed account of the study area and selection of the sample, see John C. Crecink and Roosevelt Steptoe, Human Resources in the Rural Mississippi Delta...With Emphasis on the Poor, U.S. Dept. Agr., Agr. Econ. Rpt. 170, pp. 2-3, Jan. 1970.

5/ Agricultural economists and rural sociologists of the Economic Research Service developed the classification scheme. The regions for comparison include: the Coastal Plain Region, the Mississippi Delta, and the Ozarks.

1. Would you take courses for education or special training if they were available and free of charge? Yes ___, No ___. Indefinite ___. If a response of "no" or "indefinite" was received the question was posed--

2. Would you take these courses if you were paid? Yes ___, No___.

The second type of action, involving changing occupations for economic advancement, was measured by three questions:

1. Would you be interested in changing to another type of job at higher pay if you could continue to live here in this community? Yes ___, No ___.

2. Would you be interested in changing to another type of job at higher pay if you would have to move away from this community to another community at least 50 miles away? Yes ___, No___.

3. Would you be willing to move to a more distant location--say 200 miles from here--for a good paying job? Yes ___, No ___.

The high association of the educational and occupational items gives evidence that an underlying variable--propensity for change--exists. 6/

To facilitate analyses, we developed a four-point propensity-for-change classification:

1. "High propensity"--responses involving the greatest willingness to change for both sets of items: would take courses or training without being subsidized and would move 200 or more miles to obtain a higher paying job.

2. "Medium-high propensity"--affirmative responses to at least one question in each set of items, but willing to a lesser degree than in the above category. For example, willing to train only if subsidized and willing to change jobs, but only if able to remain in the same community.

3. "Medium-low propensity"--an affirmative response to one or more questions within only one of either set of items, but negative responses to all the questions in the other. Willing to change jobs, but not willing to train--whether subsidized or not.

4. "Low propensity"--negative responses to all items in each category.

Social Participation

Chapin's social participation scale was used to determine the kind and degree of participation in voluntary organizations (4, pp. 275-278). Four

6/ Adjusted coefficients of contingency for the cross-classification combinations ranged from 0.480 to 0.653.

Table 1.--Household size-income classes: Relative income deprivation based on relationship of income to household size, Mississippi Delta Region, 1966

Household income	Household size-income classes				
	I. Seriously deprived	II. Deprived	III. Marginal	IV. Probably not deprived	V. Not deprived
	----------Persons----------				
$ 0-$999	2 or more	1	---	---	---
$ 1,000-$1,999	5 or more	2, 3, or 4	1	---	---
$ 2,000-$2,999	9 or more	4 through 8	2 and 3	1	---
$ 3,000-$4,999	---	8 or more	4 through 7	2 and 3	1
$ 5,000-$7,499	---	---	9 or more	4 through 8	1 through 3
$ 7,500-$9,999	---	---	---	6 or more	1 through 5
$10,000 and over	---	---	---	9 or more	1 through 8

components of organizational affiliation were weighed: 1) organization membership, 2) frequency of attendance, 3) committee membership, and 4) office-holding. The Chapin method assigns different weights to the four components of participation, with the greatest weight allotted to activities requiring the most involvement. Therefore, membership in an organization carried a weight of 1; high frequency of attendance, 2--if meetings were attended "fairly often" or "regularly;" membership in a committee--3; and holding an office--4. Each individual's total comprised the sum of his scores for each activity.

Fatalism

Fatalism (sometimes termed "anomia"), refers to the sociopsychological state of an individual or his attitude. The underlying doctrine is that all events are determined by necessity, or fate, that there is little an individual can do to change what he perceives as his destiny.

A six-item, Guttman-type Srole scale was used to measure the extent of fatalistic orientation among the respondents (5, 11). Srole's scale, though originally constructed to measure what was variously termed as social dysfunction (malintegration) or group alienation (demoralization), is often called a scale of "anomia." However, there is a tendency to confuse Srole's concept of "anomia," which refers to the psychological state of individuals, with the sociological condition of a group or a society ("anomie") characterized by a state of relative normlessness. Thus, the word "fatalism" is used to avoid confusion, and because it seems most accurately to depict the single dimension meaning of the scale. Dorothy L. Meier and Wendell Bell use such terms as "despair," "hopelessness," "discouragement," "personal disorganization," and "demoralization" in reference to the Srole scale (10).

Five possible responses to each of the scale items were: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) undecided, 4) disagree, and 5) strongly disagree. However, the two degrees of agreement and the two degrees of disagreement were consolidated into single "agree" and "disagree" categories to facilitate analysis and to reduce error. "Undecided" responses were assigned to the "disagree" category, where the least error would be produced. The responses were processed by the Cornell computer technique (8), utilizing the UCLA Biomed Program. The Cornell technique yields a scoring distribution based on increasing frequencies of "yes" or "no" responses. The scale printout score was manipulated to develop scale types which involved minimal error. Where error patterns produced a situation in which assignment to one or another scale type would be arbitrary, these patterns were grouped and assigned alternately to upper and lower types. This procedure canceled error bias throughout the range of scale types. The resulting scale is termed a Guttman-type scale although it does not conform to all of Guttman's requirements. Even though all of the requirements are not met, an important criterion is ". . . that it is possible to derive from the distribution a quantitative variable with which to characterize the objects, such that each attribute is a simple function of that quantitative variable" (9, p.54). The poverty scale responses by the Cornell technique yielded a coefficient of reproducibility of 0.844. However, upon rearranging the data into scale

types (rather than scores) in terms of least error, the coefficient of reproducibility was raised to 0.919 (12, ch. 4).

The following six items (in their scale order) comprised the Srole scale:

1. Even if a family objects, a man should choose a job that he thinks is best for him.

2. There's little use writing to public officials because often they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man.

3. It is hardly fair to bring children into the world, the way things look for the future.

4. Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.

5. In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better.

6. These days a person doesn't really know on whom he can count.

The range of percentages of positive responses for each item varied between 11 percent for item 1 and 82 percent for item 6. While unevenness of the scale score distributions indicated a need for improving the measuring instrument's sensitivity, the scale was considered adequate as a gross measure.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION, FATALISM, AND PROPENSITY FOR CHANGE

The social participation typology and fatalism scale types were cross-classified with the four degrees of propensity for change. High-low classifications provided chi-square values. In line with the exploratory nature of this study, we first partitioned the values into category combinations and analyzed them to determine whether major variations in statistical significance and relationship direction could be induced. The negative results proved the dichotomous classification scheme adequate for computations for the total population, and for age, sex, and race groups. The assumption that persons highly disposed to change would have high rates of participation was tested with one-tailed levels of significance (table 2). Only male, female, and white categories were significantly associated at the 0.05 level.

Additional breakdowns for different combinations of attributes revealed that the responses of Negro females and white males primarily contributed to the respective relationships (see table 3 for frequencies). A one-way relationship exists for the white male and the Negro female categories. However, for the white males, the relationship is the opposite from that

predicted. For Negro females, low propensity for change is associated with low social participation. But, for white males low propensity for change is associated with high social participation. In the former case, the adjusted coefficient of contingency is 0.306, in the latter 0.202. No statistically significant associations were obtained between the propensity for change and fatalism variables for any of the respondent categories. We therefore concluded that there are only two exceptions to the disproved view that participation and fatalism block attempts to improve life style: social participation and propensity for change relations among white males and Negro females.

Table 2.--Relationship of propensity for change to social participation among heads of poor households, Mississippi Delta, 1966

Control groups	No. of persons	Chi-square values 1/
All respondents	837	0.02
Respondents 45 years of age and under	2/ 249	0.08
Respondents over 45 years of age	2/ 574	0.13
Males	662	3/ 3.17*
Females	175	6.07**
Whites	319	4.04**
Males	269	3/ 5.60**
Females	44	2.28
Negroes	518	0.82
Males	393	0.02
Females	131	7.73***

1/ One-tailed tests of significance with one degree of freedom.
2/ Total for age classification is less than 837, since ages were not obtained for all respondents.
3/ Direction opposite from that predicted.

Note: Levels of statistical significance--*0.05; **0.01; ***0.001.

Comparisons were made to ascertain whether the above findings might be the product of different types of organizational activities predominantly engaged in by each group (table 4). Females of both races engage in church-related activities more than males. However, the greatest difference lies between white males and Negro females. Further, white male membership in

Table 3.--Propensity for change and social participation among heads of poor households, Mississippi Delta, 1966: Cross-classification cell frequencies for control categories yielding significant associations

Type of respondents and level of social participation	Propensity for change			Z test 1/	Chi-square 2/	C 3/
	High	Low	Total			
All females					---	---
High	56	60	116	-0.44	---	---
Low	17	42	59	-4.78***	6.07**	0.259
Total	73	102	175	---		
All white					---	---
High	57	85	142	4/ -2.43**	---	---
Low	91	86	177	0.27	4.04*	0.158
Total	148	171	319	---		
Negro female					---	---
High	42	40	82	0.22	---	---
Low	13	36	49	-3.22***	7.73***	0.306
Total	55	76	131	---		
White male					---	---
High	43	64	107	4/ -2.07*	---	---
Low	89	73	162	1.27	5.60**	0.202
Total	132	137	269	---		

1/ Single-sample test for difference between means.
2/ One-tailed tests of significance with one degree of freedom.
3/ Adjusted coefficient of contingency.
4/ Direction of relationship opposite from that predicted.

Note: Levels of statistical significance--*0.05; **0.01; ***0.001.

Table 4.--Organizational membership: Positive response comparisons among sex-race groupings of poor household heads, Mississippi Delta, 1966

Organization	Males		Females	
	White N = 269	Negro N = 369	White N = 54	Negro N = 131
	Percent			
Church	47.3	55.8	71.7	63.6
Church group	7.6	11.8	13.2	15.9
Civic group	1.8	0.5	3.8	0.0
Farm organization	6.5	1.3	1.9	0.0
Lodge	3.6	4.7	3.8	3.8
Labor union	0.7	0.3	1.9	0.0
Co-op	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Political organization	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Community or neighborhood club	2.2	0.3	3.8	2.3
Community action program	1.1	0.3	0.0	0.0
PTA	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0
Other	0.4	0.8	0.0	0.8
Total	74.8	76.1	100.1	86.4

1/ Figures are percentages of positive responses obtained from respective categories of the poverty population.

"social action" activities is relatively high, compared with the almost complete lack of Negro woman membership in that type of organization. 7/

7/ "Social action" activities can be broadly classified as those in which participation is for the purpose of changing, either directly or indirectly, social, economic, or political conditions (participation in farm organizations, labor unions, co-ops, and community action programs).

The findings may show that one side of the "status crystallization" type of relationship operates in reference to white males. That is, individuals with low social mobility potential (propensity for change) have relatively highly crystallized statuses. Therefore, they can participate in organizations which would make them feel uncomfortable under more dissonant circumstances. For example, the socially immobile person would feel relatively sure of his statuses and appropriate roles in civic, farm, political, and similar organizations. But those who are in the process of upward social mobility and who must redefine "correct" behavior would tend to avoid joining such organizations. On the other hand, the female Negro tends to participate in church-related organizations. 8/ Thus, the notions of status crystallization and dissonance seldom or never apply. In the case of the latter, low propensity for change may well tie in with such factors as age, disability, or family burdens, since the Negro female is often a household head because she is widowed, separated, or divorced. These factors might preclude most social participation, even weekly church activities.

One-way relationships for these variables may reflect the need for further refinement in the conceptualization and sensitivity of measurement. Propensity for change in this study centers on potential for mobility, rather than to mobility itself. Respondents who are not actively mobile may not have been adequately sampled, because they may have already migrated out of the region in search of better conditions. These individuals would experience the greatest dissonance from status inconsistency. "The people left behind" who indicate relatively high willingness to change may not yet have experienced status inconsistency.

The concept of social participation and its measurement assumes accessibility to organizations, and this assumption cannot always be met. There is evidence that fewer participation channels are open to persons of lower status, particularly poor minority groups, than to the relatively affluent. Thus, participation scores, as such, may reflect the external situation of an individual rather than his inclination.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH AND LOW PROPENSITY FOR CHANGE

Sociodemographic characteristics were cross-tabulated with the propensity for change variable: Age, sex, race, marital status, education, literacy, degree of poverty, household size, length of time lived in same county, and area of residence (table 5).

8/ This does not imply that all rural churches are status quo--that is, in terms of perpetuating the theme that satisfaction lies in the life hereafter, not in life on this earth--or even passive types of organizations. Some churches, particularly Negro churches, are becoming increasingly action-oriented for social and economic change.

Table 5.--Propensity for change classified by sociodemographic characteristics of heads of poor households, Mississippi Delta, 1966

Characteristics	Propensity for change			Z test 1/	Chi-square 2/	C 3/
	High	Low	Total			
	Persons					
Age						
Respondents 45 years of age and under	196	53	249	9.17***	---	---
Respondents over 45 years of age	223	351	574	-4.03***	---	---
Total	419	404	823	---	110.33***	0.486
Sex						
Male	346	293	639	2.03*	---	---
Female	73	111	184	-2.72**	---	---
Total	419	404	823	---	12.00**	0.170
Race						
White	150	173	323	-1.74	---	---
Negro	269	231	500	1.70	---	---
Total	419	404	823	4/ 2.18**	4.23*	0.101
Marital status						
Married	331	261	592	2.88**	---	---
Unmarried	87	142	229	-3.64***	---	---
Total	418	403	821	---	21.23***	0.224
Household size						
1-5 members	315	240	555	3.30***	---	---
6 or more	56	179	235	-7.98***	---	---
Total	371	419	790	---	71.96***	0.409
Education						
Above 6th grade	192	132	324	3.24***	---	---
6th grade or less	227	272	499	-2.46*	---	---
Total	419	404	823	---	14.85***	0.188
Above 10th grade	40	30	70	1.17	---	---
Less than 3rd grade	54	108	162	-4.33***	---	---
Total	94	138	232	---	11.42***	0.306
Literacy						
Literate	102	117	219	---	---	---
Semiliterate or illiterate	82	111	193	---	---	---
Total	184	193	412	---	0.70	---

Continued

Table 5.--Propensity for change classified by sociodemographic characteristics of heads of poor households, Mississippi Delta, 1966--Continued

Characteristics	Propensity for change			Z test 1/	Chi-square 2/	C 3/
	High	Low	Total			
	Persons					
Degree of poverty						
Seriously deprived	171	139	310	---	---	---
Deprived	157	169	326	---	---	---
Marginal	91	94	185	---	---	---
Total	419	402	821	---	4/ 3.45	---
Length of time lived in same county						
All of life	297	255	522	1.79	---	---
Less than all of life	121	145	266	-1.64	---	---
Total	418	400	818	5/ 2.31*	4.95*	0.110
Area of residence						
Open country	288	261	549	---	---	---
Town or village	128	141	269	---	---	---
Total	416	402	818	---	1.27	---

1/ Single-sample test for difference between means.
2/ One-tailed tests of significance with one degree of freedom.
3/ Adjusted coefficient of contingency.
4/ Two degrees of freedom.
5/ Computed single-sample difference of proportions for diagonal values.

Note: Levels of statistical significance--*0.05: **0.01: ***0.001.

Propensity for change and age were found inversely related. An older person will less likely take sizable steps for change than a younger person.

Males have a significantly higher propensity for change than females, but as indicated previously, this may result from the female household head's family burdens. There may be no one to share the work and family responsibilities in such single-parent households. Thus, when the sex category is controlled by the marital status category, no significant associations were found between propensity for change and sex. Most respondents not married at the time of the survey had been married previously. Of the few that had never been married, almost all had a high propensity for change.

As we hypothesized, propensity for change was related to marital status. Married respondents had higher propensities for change than the unmarried.

Propensity for change declined as household size increased, indicating that situational factors influence change. Here again, heavy family responsibilities appear to depress inclination to change.

Negroes have a higher disposition for change than whites; this may be an outgrowth of Negroes' rising expectations generated by the civil rights movement. They may feel that their chances to improve life conditions seem greater than before.

Tests of association between propensity for change and educational attainment included dichotomous and extreme divisions of years of schooling completed. The dichotomy comprised respondents with 6 years' schooling or less and those with more than 6 years' schooling. Propensity for change increased with educational attainment, but tests of association utilizing the educational attainment extremes yielded only a one-way relationship. Individuals with less than a third-grade education tended to have low propensity for change. No association was revealed for those with educational attainment above the 10th grade. Apparently, educational attainment above the sixth grade was more crucial to propensity for change than the upper extremes. Significantly, literacy was not related to propensity for change.

Household size-income classes were cross-tabulated with disposition to change to determine if degree of deprivation might be significant. No relationship existed between the three degrees of poverty and propensity for change.

Respondents who had lived all their lives in the same county inclined more toward change than those who had lived in other locations. Since younger household heads--those most willing to change--had fewer opportunities to have lived elsewhere, age may constitute a factor.

No relationship existed between propensity for change and residence for most of an individual's life in a town or village, or in the open country.

Propensity for Change Among the Relatively Affluent

Determining the correlates of propensity for change among the rural poor constituted the primary focus of this study. For comparison, the analyses were also directed toward determining whether the same relationships and characteristics apply to more affluent individuals in the Mississippi Delta as well. Somewhat different strategies of analysis were required to determine if inferences could be extended to the larger population.

Comparing the extent of organizational participation between the poor and the nonpoor respondents required different scale criteria than those for analyzing either population separately, so composite scale criteria were used. That is, the score distributions of all respondents, poor and nonpoor, must enter into the cross-population analyses. This procedure cancels the effect of characteristics peculiar to either segment and provides a common basis for comparison. The initial population analyses carried the assumption that the poor had unique, intrinsic attitudes and behavior that set them apart from the more affluent. Consequently, for measuring within poor or nonpoor groups, we developed scale scores based solely on individual responses in each group. This prevented distortion by factors peculiar to either group, as might have happened if the scale had been based on the entire population.

In other words, the criteria used precluded distortion of variance by poor or nonpoor variables influencing social participation within each group.

We employed a similar strategy for fatalism, analyzing the poor and nonpoor groups separately. All Delta sample responses combined formed a composite scale for the cross-category analyses. The coefficients of reproducibility for the poor, nonpoor, and composite scales were 0.919, 0.894, and 0.915.

In comparing the extent of participation in voluntary associations, the results of the "composite" cross-population analysis largely confirmed the findings of other researchers. A one-way relationship exists between high-low social participation cross-classified by poverty and relative affluence (table 6). Nonpoor respondents had relatively high social participation. The organizational membership of the nonpoor group ranked much higher (table 7).

Table 6.--Social participation among the poor and the relatively affluent heads of households, Mississippi Delta, 1966

Income level	Social participation			Z test 1/	Chi-square 2/	C 3/
	High	Low	Total			
	Persons					
Poor	433	404	837	0.87	---	---
Nonpoor	210	99	309	6.33***	---	---
Total	643	503	1,146	---	24.10***	0.204

1/ Single-sample test for difference between means.
2/ One-tailed test of significance.
3/ Adjusted coefficient of contingency.

Note: Level of statistical significance--***0.001.

In breakdowns of fatalism responses among poor and nonpoor respondents, a positive relationship obtained between poverty and fatalism (table 8). People in poverty display a higher incidence of fatalism than the relatively affluent. However, propensity for change was not linked with social participation or fatalism for any age, sex, or race categories (table 9).

Affluent respondents with a high propensity for change compared with the poor in their tendencies to be younger and members of smaller households, and their likelihood to have gone beyond the sixth grade in school (table 10). Whites generally showed low willingness to change, but contrary to the poor Negroes who displayed high willingness to change, nonpoor Negroes showed no

Table 7.--Organizational membership: Positive response comparisons between poor and nonpoor household heads, Mississippi Delta, 1966

Type of organization	Poor group N = 837	Nonpoor group N = 309
	Percent	
Church	55.2	69.0
Church group	11.2	20.4
Civic group	1.0	8.0
Farm organization	2.9	16.0
Lodge	4.2	11.8
Labor union	0.5	5.4
Co-op	1.0	10.2
Political organization	0.2	1.6
Community or neighborhood club	1.4	6.4
Community action program	0.5	2.2
PTA	0.1	0.3
Other	0.6	4.5

Table 8.--Fatalism among the poor and relatively affluent household heads, Mississippi Delta, 1966

Income level	Social participation			Z test 1/	Chi-square 2/	C 3/
	High	Low	Total			
Poor	570	144	714	17.31***	---	---
Nonpoor	120	148	268	-1.67*	---	---
Total	690	292	982	---	114.58***	0.457

1/ Single-sample test for difference between means.
2/ One-tailed test of significance with one degree of freedom.
3/ Adjusted coefficient of contingency.

Note: Levels of statistical significance--*0.05; ***0.001.

Table 9.--Relationship of propensity for change to social participation and fatalism among relatively affluent heads of households, Mississippi Delta, 1966

Control groups	No. of persons 1/	Chi-square values 2/	
		Social Participation	Fatalism
All respondents	319	1.54	0.89
Respondents 45 years of age and under	139	1.92	0.04
Respondents over 45 years of age	168	0.47	2.16
Males	294	0.96	0.13
Females	21	0.10	0.04
Whites	272	1.22	0.00
Negroes	35	0.61	0.25

1/ Totals for age, sex, and race categories vary, since information for some respondents was not available.
2/ One-tailed tests of significance with one degree of freedom.

significant tendency in either direction. 9/ Further, the most affluent group of the nonpoor displayed relatively low propensity for change, compared with the other nonpoor category, though propensity for change and degree of poverty or affluence showed no relation in other groups. 10/

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This research problem centered on assessing the social characteristics of the rural poor of the Mississippi Delta Region with high levels of aspiration or propensities to change. Specific assumptions concerning

9/ Due to the limited number of nonpoor Negroes--35--caution should be exercised in drawing firm conclusions from this finding.
10/ The most affluent individuals' propensities for change may not be adequately measured by the scale instrument, as the willingness to change items were designed for administration to a poverty population. For example, the relatively affluent individual with an adequate income would not be likely to change jobs and leave the community for higher pay alone. The measuring instrument is not sensitive to the types of change this stratum might take for upward mobility.

Table 10.--Propensity for change classified by sociodemographic characteristics of relatively affluent household heads, Mississippi Delta, 1966

Characteristics	Propensity for change			Z test 1/	Chi-square 2/	C 3/
	High	Low	Total			
Age:						
Respondents 45 years of age and under	83	56	139	2.38*	---	---
Respondents over 45 years of age	57	111	168	-4.16***	---	---
Total	140	167	307	---	20.36***	0.352
Race:						
White	118	154	272	-2.33*	---	---
Negro	22	13	35	1.54	---	---
Total	140	167	307	---	4.68*	0.173
Household size:						
1 to 5 members	143	106	249	2.22*	---	---
6 or more	24	34	58	-3.20**	---	---
Total	167	140	307	---	43.79***	0.500
Education:						
Above 6th grade	142	123	265	1.20	---	---
6th grade or less	20	34	54	-1.92	---	---
Total	162	157	319	4/ 1.97	4.88*	0.173
Degree of affluence:						
Probably not deprived	78	58	136	1.65*	---	---
Not deprived	62	109	171	-3.74***	---	---
Total	140	167	307	---	13.62***	0.291

1/ Single-sample test for difference between means.
2/ One-tailed tests of significance with one degree of freedom.
3/ Adjusted coefficient of contingency.
4/ Computed single-sample difference of proportions for diagonal values.

Note: Levels of statistical significance--*0.05; **0.01; ***0.001.

propensity for change among the poor appear to have little validity. A person's willingness to change had little relation to his participation in voluntary associations. Inclination to change had no relation to feelings of fatalism.

The relationships between poor respondents' propensity for change and selected social characteristics show the following profile:

1. Propensity for change decreased with age. Younger persons indicated more willingness to change.
2. Married household heads tended to have higher propensities for change than those unmarried.
3. Propensity for change declined as household size increased. Heads of smaller households seemed more willing to change.
4. Negroes had a higher disposition toward change than whites.
5. Propensity for change increased with educational attainment. Reluctance to change tended to accompany lower attainment.

Other variables associated with propensity for change were considered byproducts of these relationships. Significantly, similar relationships between selected social characteristics and propensity for change applied to the more affluent population in the Delta. Regardless of the degree of poverty or affluence, the same principles appear to be associated with willingness to take steps for social and economic change.

Approximately equal percentages of the poor and nonpoor groups evidenced propensity for change. The degree of poverty (or affluence) was associated with the disposition to change variable only in the relatively affluent segment. That is, the most affluent individuals were less willing to change than the relatively affluent strata directly beneath them.

Generally, low participation in voluntary associations characterized the rural population as a whole. As level of deprivation decreased, however, social participation increased. Poverty was associated with higher rates of fatalism. Yet poor respondents as well as the relatively affluent showed no association between propensity for change and either social participation or fatalism. Thus, lower rates of social participation and higher rates of fatalism typify the poor in the Mississippi Delta. However, these variables, generally, did not relate to propensity for change.

The findings that poor persons with high propensity for change were generally younger, married, heads of smaller households, Negro, and educated above the sixth grade have several implications for social action which largely support existing information. Meaningful social action programs should be developed for individuals unlikely to change. Older individuals need opportunities which do not require some type of action or change in mode of living on their part. It is probably unrealistic to expect people to enroll in training courses or leave the community for another job if they are over 45 years of age or are household heads with large families. Special attention should focus on single-parent families. The single female household head (whether young and with children or old and isolated) requires aid programs directly related to her plight.

The slight tendency for lower propensities for change among whites may present difficulties when attempts are made to alter their condition. In effect, they might be considered as a "harder core" of poverty--they are poor even in the absence of racial discrimination.

Special efforts will also be required to motivate segments of the poor with exceptionally low education (sixth grade or less) and to provide jobs for which they may be capable.

The most significant finding revealed that while lower rates of social participation and higher rates of fatalism characterize the poor, these variables do not significantly affect an individual's mobility potential. A more positive possibility occurs here for social action change agents wishing to gain acceptance of and participation in their programs; this possibility is contrary to prevailing assumptions. There is no support for the notion that apathy or fatalism make those in the lower strata resist change, nor is potential for mobility associated with social participation. Informing all segments of the poor about the opportunities available and ways to take advantage of them remains a problem, because many individuals do not participate in organizations where communication might be established. Perhaps they lack the opportunity or are unwilling to participate.

It is important that most of the rural poor in the Delta were not taking part in the few programs available to them. The programs may not have been directly applicable to their needs. Thus, one of the main problems appears to be the formation of training and job opportunities relevant and appropriate to the requirements and dispositions of people in the Delta.

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